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RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT UNDERSTAFFED AND
OVERWORKED

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ministry of Environmental Protection has been restructured, but faces a shortage of inspectors who inspect enterprises to ensure they comply with emissions regulations. Because it takes too long to get the Procurator General's permission to conduct random environmental inspections, inspectors have difficulty finding evidence that an enterprise is violating emissions standards. Kazakhstan will adopt Euro-3 emission standards in 2009. A proposed draft law to ban the import of outdated equipment and technology also stipulates that all gas stations will have to sell unleaded gasoline. END SUMMARY.

MINISTRY OF PROTECTION FACES SHORTAGE OF INSPECTORS

13. (SBU) In a December meeting with the Regional Environmental Officer (REO), Senior State Inspector Bizara Dosmakova of the Ministry of Environmental Protection's Committee on Environmental Regulation and Control explained that her Committee is responsible for implementing and overseeing the Ministry's environmental policies. Dosmakova said the Committee issues emissions permits and licenses to use natural resources and also conducts random environmental inspections. She said the Ministry will transfer some of its tasks, such as the issuance of licenses, to local governments in 2009 and the Ministry will then focus on policy-making rather than regulatory functions.

14. (SBU) Dosmakova said the Committee now faces a severe shortage of state environmental inspectors and currently has only 525 inspectors to cover the entire country. (NOTE: Kazakhstan is the world's ninth largest country by area. END NOTE.) Dosmakova confessed that the Ministry's recent reorganization created a less efficient structure, combining the previous 14 oblast divisions and two municipal divisions (Almaty and Astana) into nine larger administrative units. Now, she said, applicants from Petropavlovsk (Kazakhstan's northernmost city) have to come to Astana to submit their applications for permits and licenses.

DIFFICULT TO CATCH VIOLATORS RED-HANDED

15. (SBU) Dosmakova said the Committee conducts regular annual inspections of "large" enterprises (she said there are only 24 such enterprises in Kazakhstan). Small- and medium-sized businesses are exempt from all inspections for the first year of operation. In addition to regular inspections, the Committee can conduct random inspections at the request of people living close to allegedly polluting enterprises. However, random inspections require permission from the Procurator General's Office -- permission which can take significant time, sometimes weeks, to obtain. As a result, she said, inspectors often arrive on the scene too late to find any evidence of unauthorized emissions. The enterprises either remove all waste residue and contaminants, or they temporarily cease production so that water and air pollution levels return to normal.

KAZAKHSTAN TO ADOPT EURO-3 EMISSIONS STANDARDS

16. (SBU) According to Dosmakova, Kazakhstan will start applying Euro-3 emissions standards in 2009, skipping the Euro-2 phase altogether. (NOTE: Europe implemented its Euro-4 standards in January 2005, with Euro-5 slated to come into effect in January 2009. Euro-3 standards took effect on January 2000. Bypassing the Euro-2 phase means Kazakhstan is willing to progress faster towards lower emissions than earlier agreed. END NOTE.) Dosmakova was not sure whether the new draft law to ban the import of outdated equipment and technologies would also include used cars. (NOTE: Press reporting indicates that it will not cover used cars, the importation of which is a lucrative business in Kazakhstan. END NOTE.) One of the proposed law's main challenges according to Dosmakova is the lack of means to get rid of older equipment and technologies. Also, under the new law, all gas stations will have to sell unleaded gasoline. (NOTE: Most large urban gas stations already sell unleaded fuel. END NOTE.)

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17. (SBU) COMMENT: We have no reason to doubt Dosmakova's description of the travails of her federal-level ministry. It is worth noting, however, that oblast-level officials seem to have adequate resources to harass and fine international corporate investors, especially in the energy sphere, for alleged environmental violations. END COMMENT.

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